

11/11/2007 Groundbreaking of the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery

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November 11, 2007

I appreciate the opportunity to share Veterans Day with you all. I commend, congratulate and thank those gathered here today - the veterans, soldiers, community and state leaders, officials from the VA and members of the congressional delegation who have worked so hard to make today's groundbreaking a reality.

It is fitting we come together during this holiday weekend to break ground for the Fort Riley veterans cemetery. 53 years ago, for our nation's first celebration of Veterans Day, President Eisenhower issued the following proclamation:

"On that day let us solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom, and let us reconsecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace so that all their efforts shall not have been in vain."

This Veterans Day, here in Ike's home state, we honor his declaration. The soil that is turned today will be some of the same soil that will be used to bury our veterans. Wherever a veterans cemetery is constructed, that place is hallowed ground. Whether it is Arlington National Cemetery, or here at the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery, these memorials send the same message: We remember. We are grateful. We will never forget.

I hold veterans in the highest regard. Our country is fortunate to have men and women who are willing to answer the call of duty and accomplish great things for the benefit of their fellow man. Even now, a new generation is fighting for the cause of freedom. And someday soon, they too will bear the honored title: veteran.

As a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I am privileged to work on behalf of veterans. Many service members have fulfilled their oath and commitment of supporting and defending the Constitution - it is only right that the government honor its commitments to them and their families, in life and in death. The Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery will provide an honorable resting space and be a lasting tribute for our Kansas veterans, commemorating their service and sacrifice on our behalf.

Several years ago I attended President Reagan's funeral service in Washington, DC. The service closed with a hymn entitled, "Mansions of the Lord." I would like to take a few moments to share it with you:

To fallen soldiers let us sing

Where no rockets fly nor bullets wing

Our broken brothers let us bring

To the mansions of the Lord

No more bleeding, no more fight

No prayers pleading through the night

Just divine embrace, eternal light

In the mansions of the Lord

Where no mothers cry and no children weep

We will stand and guard though the angels

sleep

Through the ages safely keep

The mansions of the Lord

We gather here today to honor the creation of this veterans cemetery - this mansion of the Lord, a fitting resting place for those we hold so dear. God bless you and the country you served.